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ABSTRACT

The Atlanta (Georgia) Public School System (APS) has many existing dropout prevention programs, but they have been operating primarily independently, with limited information sharing or coordination. In 1986 these programs were linked through the formation of the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Collaborative, which unites the public school system with parents, agencies, businesses, and the general community in a cohesive entity designed to promote activities to lower the dropout rate. The Atlanta Collaborative had the following objectives: (1) to devise a collaborative process whereby each member agency/organization is actively involved in insuring the successful implementation of project activities; (2) to identify in-school and out-of-school factors that might contribute to a student's decision to drop out; (3) to investigate the currently operating barriers to meaningful employment for youth who need employment; (4) to improve APS record-keeping and reporting procedures in the area of dropouts so that the data are more complete, accurate, and useful; and (5) to develop dropout program activities that respond to the causative factors identified. Findings on these factors are presented on three tables. The following aspects of the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Plan are discussed: (1) Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery; (2) adaptation in instructional delivery; (3) tutorials; (4) counseling and supplemental services; (5) education for employment; (6) parental involvement; (7) staff development/training; and (8) evaluation. (BJV)

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THE ATLANTA DROPOUT PREVENTION PLAN

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THE ATLANTA DROPOUT PREVENTION PLAN

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November, 1987

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Education is the avenue to make our youth both dreamers and doers . . . and to reach our adults with better means of meeting a changing world.

Joe Frank Harris, Governor of Georgia
Results in Education (1987)

BACKGROUND

Atlanta, Georgia, is the burgeoning transportation and service hub of the Southeastern United States. The city proper, which sits at the center of an 18-county standard metropolitan statistical area, has a population of slightly fewer than 600,000 persons. During the past decade, this population has become more diverse with the influx of numerous Asian, Spanish surnamed, West Indian, and Caribbean persons. Of this total number of individuals, approximately 42 percent are classified as low income (Profiles of Change, 1982).

Slightly more than 10 percent or 67,387 of the inhabitants of the central city are students enrolled in the Atlanta Public School System. Similar to most urban areas, Atlanta is a dichotomous entity containing a growing predominantly white suburban ring and a predominantly minority central city. This trend which has been ongoing for better than three decades has resulted in a city public education system which is 90.1 percent black.

The Atlanta Public School System has a total of 113 schools. Eighteen of these schools are high schools, 12 are middle schools, and 83 are elementary schools. In addition to this traditional educational institution, the Atlanta Public School System operates one evening school, five community schools, six alternative schools (five cooperatively with Cities-in-Schools), four special schools, and one vocational technical school.

Existing Programs

The Atlanta Public School System recognized the need to provide services to current and potential dropouts almost 30 years ago. This initial undertaking which was designed to service World War II veterans and others has been operating since the mid 40's. Atlanta's oldest program is Washington Evening School, and the youngest began in the early spring of 1986 (Pilot PIC Dropout Prevention Program). These programs have operated primarily independently with limited information sharing or coordination. Each of the existing programs is listed below with a brief description and its linkage to the Collaborative.

Washington Evening School

A primarily adult-focused evening program designed to offer residents of the city of Atlanta who have not completed their high school careers the opportunity to return to school and pursue a high school diploma. Enrollment in this program is limited to persons 16 years of age or older.

Linkage: The Washington Evening School Program is linked to the Collaborative through its subcommittee structure by the Representative from the Area III Administrative Office which is responsible for this program.

Downtown Learning Center

A program of the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) for young people who have experienced difficulties in the traditional school. This day time alternative educational program is for high-school-aged students who have either voluntarily transferred or have been administratively placed in this setting.

Linkage: The Downtown Learning Center is linked to the Collaborative through its subcommittee structure by the Representative from the Area II Administrative Office which is responsible for this program.

Community Schools

APS-operated evening programs operated through five locations. Each location offers a variety of enrichment, continuing education, and GED preparation courses.

Linkage: No linkage to the Collaborative.

Cities-in-Schools

A program conducted by Exodus Incorporated in cooperation with the Atlanta Public Schools which provides an alternative setting for students to complete their high school studies. Cities-in-Schools participants are students unable to cope/adjust with the traditional education setting and who have either left of their own volition, been administratively transferred, or who have been expelled.

Linkage: Cities-in-Schools is represented on the core Collaborative by its Executive Director.

Adopt-a-Student

A program jointly conducted by the Atlanta Public Schools and the Merit Employment Association which targets the lower 25 percent of the population of a high school. Students are linked with a person from the business community who serves as a mentor and advocate.

Linkage: Adopt-a-Student is represented on the core Collaborative by its Director, who is also the Convenor of the Collaborative.

Child Treatment Center

An educational program conducted by APS in cooperation with Fulton County to address the educational needs of students adjudicated by the juvenile court system. This program is housed in the Fulton County Juvenile Detention Center and staffed by APS personnel to meet the needs of all the detained school-age youth.

Linkage: The Child Treatment Center is represented on the Core Collaborative by Ms. Betty Freeman, the designee of the the Chief Judge of the Fulton County Juvenile Court, and a Probation Officer Supervisor.

Title XX Comprehensive Child Day Care Program

A program funded by the state of Georgia and conducted by the Atlanta Public Schools designed to provide child care services in targeted communities. Many of the recipients of this program's services are former APS students who avail themselves of this service in order to return to school.

Linkage: The Title XX Program is linked to the Core Collaborative by the representative from the Division of Curriculum and Research Services which is administratively responsible for this program.

Hank Aaron Scholarship Fund

A financial assistance program managed by APS which is designed to alleviate a financial need which interferes with the school performance/attendance of a student currently enrolled in an APS high school.

Linkage: The Hank Aaron Scholarship Fund is linked to the Core Collaborative by the Representative from the Division of Curriculum and Research Services which is administratively responsible for this program.

Explorer Program

A program operated cooperatively with the Boy Scouts of America in which all students in targeted grades at participating high schools are exposed to various work rules through visits to employment sites. The program includes monthly discussion sessions with persons from backgrounds similar to the participants who have succeeded in their chosen professions.

Linkage: The Explorer Program is linked to the Collaborative through its subcommittee structure by the Metro Executive from the Boy Scouts of America.

Adolescent Development

Teen Intervention Program (TIP) - a program operated by APS targeting pre-adolescent males in selected middle schools designed to help them become emotionally mature and sexually responsible teenagers.

Adolescent Development and Early Parent Training (ADEPT) - a program operated under the auspices of Georgia State University wherein all entering students at grade 9 in two targeted high schools are involved in a series of seminars designed to help them make educated choices. Follow-up sessions are held once per semester with students at other grade levels as well as parent training sessions with the students who have delivered along with their mothers/grandmothers.

Linkage: The Adolescent Development programs are linked to the Core Collaborative by the Teen Services Program of the Fulton County Health Department and to the Collaborative subcommittees by the Director of Project ADEPT.

Youth Employment Programs

Summer Youth Employment Program - a nine-week work experience program funded by the Atlanta Private Industry Council. The program provides work experience, career counseling, and labor market information to youth between the ages of 14 and 21.

Project ALERT - a nine-week education for employment program funded by the Atlanta Private Industry Council. The participating 14- to 16-year-old students are provided basic skills instruction communications and computation, employment experiences, labor market information, employability skills training, and vocational as well as career counseling.

Handicapped Training - a ten-month program to train mentally handicapped students funded by the Atlanta Private Industry Council. The program provides employment-related classroom instruction designed to lead to long-term unsubsidized employment for students 18 years or older expected to receive a Certificate of Attendance.

Project PACT - a ten-month pilot program funded by the Atlanta Private Industry Council. This program provides potential dropouts in two target high schools with academic assistance, job-seeking and job-keeping skills, as well as counseling and supportive services. The program operates as an extension of the regular school day.

Linkage: The referenced youth employment programs are linked to the core collaborative through the Atlanta PIC Youth Employment Director.

Though the array of programs provided by and with the Atlanta Public Schools would seem to indicate that there is a school/educational setting/program capable of meeting the educational needs of any enrolling student, the APS dropout rate and the data gathered by the Atlanta Collaborative fail to support such a contention.

THE ATLANTA COLLABORATIVE

Those initial members of the Core Atlanta Collaborative were invited by the Superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools to become active co-participants with the school system in developing an Atlanta Dropout Prevention Plan under the auspicies of a grant from the Ford Foundation. The Core Collaborative members had indicated their commitment by letter three months prior to receipt of funding. Since its inception in October of 1986, the membership of the Atlanta Collaborative has expanded. Membership in the Atlanta Collaborative is comprised of Primary members who make up the Core Collaborative Planning Committee and Secondary members who comprise the subcommittees of the Collaborative.

The Primary Collaborative members are: Superintendent - Atlanta Public Schools; Mayor - City of Atlanta; Public Safety Commissioner - City of Atlanta; Deans - Colleges of Education and Public & Urban Affairs - Georgia State University; Deans - Schools of Education and Social Work, Atlanta University; Atlanta Urban League; Metropolitan Atlanta Christian Council; Atlanta Private Industry Council; Georgia Department of Education; Apple Corps; Atlanta Council of PTA's; Fulton County Juvenile Court; Emory University Center for Faith Development; Coca-Cola USA; Georgia Pacific Corporation; Singer Corporation Education Division; Southern Educational Foundation; Exodus, Inc.; Greater Atlanta Conservation Corps; Fulton County Health Department; and the Atlanta Housing Authority; with technical assistance provided by the Southern Regional Council. Representatives of several of the offices/organizations/corporations listed above serve on the four collaborative subcommittees. In addition, these subcommittees are comprised of the following secondary collaborative members: Big Brothers and Big Sisters; Fulton County Health Department Teen Clinical Services; Boy Scouts of America; Fulton County Board of Commissioners; Metropolitan Atlanta Boys Clubs and Girls Clubs; Metropolitan Atlanta YMCA and YWCA; Girl Scouts of the USA; Adolescent Development and Early Parent Training Program; Atlanta Association of Educators; Atlanta Federation of Teachers; School Social Workers; School Counselors; Adolescent Development and Early Parent Training (ADEPT); High School Principals; and the Atlanta Bi-Lingual and Special Education Programs.

Formation of the Atlanta Collaborative for Dropout Prevention was the first step in the development of the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Plan. The Atlanta Collaborative had as its goal the development of a culturally sensitive comprehensive dropout prevention program based on an analysis of locally identified causative factors. In achieving this goal, the Atlanta Collaborative operationalized five objectives.

The first objective, "To devise a collaborative process whereby each member agency/organization is actively involved in insuring the successful implementation of project activities," was achieved by establishing a core collaborative of 21 agencies/organizations, including the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, and three businesses. Additionally, a secondary collaborative group of 14 additional agencies and organizations was involved with the four collaborative subcommittees. These collaboratives and their subcommittees have been meeting on a monthly basis. Through these monthly sessions, core and secondary collaborative members have reviewed data; proposed responses to findings yielded by data via programs or recommendations; and initiated negotiations regarding implementation of programs contained in the Atlanta Plan.

The second objective, "To identify in-school and out-of-school factors which might contribute to a student's decision to drop out," was implemented through the gathering of data from and on APS dropouts, and from students currently enrolled in APS. Face-to-face interviews were held with a sample of APS dropouts exiting the school system during the past three years. The student records of all dropouts from 1984 to 1987 were examined, and a Social Climate Scale was administered to a sample of students attending the APS high schools having the highest and lowest dropout rates reported for 1985-86. The data shown in Tables 1-3 were yielded through the operationalization of this objective. These findings provide the quantifiable base for the Proposed Atlanta Dropout Prevention Plan.

Objective three, "To investigate the currently operating barriers to meaningful employment for youth who need employment," was implemented through the Employment Subcommittee of the Atlanta Collaborative. Initial data was gleaned from the information provided by the interviews and review of student records. Further work in respect to this objective will have to be done in ensuing months with respect to the area of youth employment as an approach to dropout reduction.

The collaborative operationalized objective four, "To improve the Atlanta Public Schools record-keeping and reporting procedures in the area of dropouts such that the data are more complete, more accurate, and more useful," through the Internal Concerns Subcommittee of the Atlanta Collaborative. This subcommittee through its review of the current procedures for collecting, recording, calculating, and reporting dropout data formulated and recommended a change in the APS dropout definition. This subcommittee's work and the Collaborative's recommendation led to the unanimous adoption by the Atlanta Board of Education of the following definition of a dropout:

> **A dropout is a person who enrolled in the Atlanta Public School System and exited without completing a planned educational program for some reason other than death, and who did not transfer to another educational system or program.**

The adoption by the Atlanta Board of Education of this definition which is Policy JQH requires that the Atlanta Public School System be accountable for students in grades K through 12 from their time of entry in the Atlanta Public School System until the day of their exit. Adopting without dissent the recommendation coming from the Atlanta Dropout Collaborative, the Atlanta Board of Education has further acknowledged that dropout prevention and recovery is a total community responsibility. The Internal Concerns Subcommittee and the Collaborative were also involved in the development of the APS Administrative Regulations which will be used to implement Policy JQH.

The fifth objective, "To develop program activities which respond to the causative factors identified," is being implemented through the Proposed Atlanta Dropout Prevention Plan which is detailed on the following pages. This plan was developed in response to the findings illustrated in the following tables.

Findings

TABLE 1

Reasons Interview Respondents Gave for Dropping Out

Sex	Pregnancy	Academic Difficulties	Personal/Family Problems	Truancy
Male	0%	15%	5%	0%
Female	50%	10%	15%	5%

TABLE 2

Reasons Recorded for 1984-1987 Dropouts Leaving APS

Pregnancy	Academic Difficulties	Personal/Family Problems	Truancy	No Show	Not Mentioned
3%	10%	11%	29%	44%	3%

TABLE 3

Reasons Recorded for 1987 Dropouts Leaving APS

Pregnancy	Academic Difficulties	Personal/Family Problems	Truancy	No Show	Other
2%	2%	2%	11%	80%	3%

Table 1 provides the most accurate view of the factors which have caused students to exit APS prior to receipt of a high school diploma. The percentages shown in Table 1 are based on primary data and show that 50 percent of the females interviewed left due to pregnancy. Conversations with these young women revealed that all would have returned to school following delivery but were prevented from doing so because of day care related problems. Twenty-five percent of the respondents stated that they dropped out because they had been retained and saw themselves getting further behind rather than progressing toward graduation. As also shown in Table 1, 20 percent of those students interviewed indicated that they left school due to personal/family problems. These problems included health difficulties (their own or a family members); work schedules which did not accommodate school; school discipline; and court actions. In each instance, however, the interviewees indicated there was no one at school interested in their problem or with whom they could talk. The other 5 percent of the respondents left APS and were withdrawn for non-attendance.

The data shown in Tables 2 and 3 are not as accurate since it was derived from student records. As can be seen in both Tables 2 and 3, the majority of the reasons recorded for leaving school were "No Show." In APS No-Show means the student failed to report during the first nine days of the new school year. Subsumed within this administrative caveat for school leaving is probably a myriad of other reasons that would result in more accurate data. In spite of the problems inherent in secondary source data, Tables 2 and 3 both show pregnancy, academic difficulties, personal/family problems, and truancy as other most frequently reported specific reasons for dropping out.

Additionally, the majority of the dropouts interviewed tended to indicate that they would probably have remained in school if parents had been more involved, if academic support services were readily available within the community, and if they perceived that they were valued as persons/students.

The findings discussed in the preceding paragraphs were yielded through the efforts of the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Collaborative in its role as Planning Committee for the development of a data-based dropout prevention plan. With the development of the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Plan, the Atlanta Collaborative redefined its role to that of a catalyst and consultant. As a catalyst, the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Collaborative -- through its existing structure of a Core Group with working subcommittees -- will assist in the implementation, monitoring, coordination, evaluation, and modification (if necessary) of the Atlanta plan. As a consultant, the Atlanta Collaborative will serve as the Advisory Group for the proposed Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery.

The plan detailed in the following sections is the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Collaborative's response to the needs identified through the data gathered from APS dropouts. Seeking to be effective in encouraging students to remain in school, the Atlanta dropout prevention strategy is student centered.

Focus is on the students' needs, whether those needs are basic skills improvement, experiencing success, development of socialization skills, understanding oneself, adjusting to home situations or new life roles, obtaining positive feelings regarding one's worth, or learning job skills. The Atlanta Comprehensive Dropout Program takes all these factors into account. The overriding premise of the Atlanta plan is that students cannot be forced to fit into the program or activity, but the activity/program must be designed to address the needs of the students. The overriding premise of the program/activities detailed in the Atlanta plan is that they are designed to address those student needs which were yielded by the data.

The access to resources is not enough; we must review outcomes to insure that all children can achieve and perform at desired levels.

William J. Bennett, U.S. Secretary
of Education

A Nation at Risk (1986)

Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery

Central to the success of the Collaborative's dropout prevention efforts is the establishment by the Atlanta Public School System of an Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery (ODPR). In order to be effective, this office must be a part of the Superintendent's Office and be charged with the management, coordination, and monitoring of the APS Dropout Prevention Program.

The Atlanta Dropout Prevention Collaborative will serve as the Advisory Group to ODPR which will be responsible for managing and staffing the Atlanta Dropout Collaborative and assisting it to forge additional linkages between other community groups in order to garner broad-based community support of the Atlanta Plan. This office will monitor the student accountability system to insure compliance with the administrative regulations so that a true and accurate picture of the APS dropout rate is provided. Additionally, the ODPR will recommend systemwide objectives in respect to dropout prevention and recovery, and establish accountability and monitoring systems that assist the Atlanta Collaborative in providing awards/incentives to schools, teachers, and students for attaining their goals in respect to dropout prevention/recovery. Dropout Prevention and Recovery public information efforts will be coordinated through the Atlanta Collaborative's public information activities designed to make the community aware of the Atlanta Plan, to improve the community's understanding of the Atlanta dropout problem, and to elicit commitments to serve at-risk members of the school-aged population.

In addition to the above general responsibilities, the ODPR will be responsible for:

-- Identifying, reviewing, and evaluating the district's present dropout prevention and recovery programs for effectiveness and current levels of support.

-- Reviewing existing policies and procedures dealing with dropouts, retention, expulsion.

-- Reviewing and revising, as appropriate, the performance objectives for each APS program serving potential dropouts or dropouts.

-- Developing a listing of dropout prevention and recovery programs within individual schools including entrance requirements and program status (open/closed).

-- Addressing the dropout problems at grades K-12, emphasizing early identification, counseling, and prevention.

-- Developing an accountability system that monitors programs and services and involves measurement of short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes and improvements.

-- Developing, maintaining, and coordinating a cadre of support services external to APS that are willing to assist in meeting the needs of potential dropouts and returning dropouts.

-- Scheduling regular meetings designed to promote action with all management staff assigned dropout program responsibilities.

-- Reviewing proposed policies and procedures for impact on dropouts.

-- Serving as system representative for state, federal, and local dropout initiatives.

-- Developing a system to identify for evaluation and research purposes: dropouts, exempt students, students in dropout programs, and potential dropouts.

-- Developing clear channels for communication regarding dropout prevention throughout APS including direct contact with schools to encourage dropout prevention and recovery activities.

-- Insuring a continuous public information flow to constituent groups within APS and the community.

-- Soliciting information and data from schools.

-- Establishing a consistent uniform system for the identification and follow-up on students who drop out.

1. Questionnaire to be completed on each dropout as soon as they leave the regular program.

2. Develop profile from questionnaire that identifies any unique needs as basis for trying to recover student.

3. Receive immediate notification of any dropout returning to system.

4. Insure that follow-up on dropouts is complete.

Data gathered through student interviews and reviews of school system data led the Atlanta Collaborative to recommend an adapted instructional delivery system designed to meet the needs of APS students experiencing academic difficulties. Twenty-five percent of the student interviews and 12 percent of the records reviewed indicated that academic difficulties were the primary reasons for dropping out. The recommended programmatic instructions emphasize affective education while providing teachers and students the necessary time, support, resources, and regulations to foster academic success. These instructional adaptations allow for the expansion of the curriculum beyond the minimum levels to encompass the full range of higher order skills. Such programs should provide for instructional options that make the curriculum meaningful while providing an opportunity for skill application. The following sections describe the Atlanta Dropout Collaborative's recommended adaptations in instructional delivery.

Adaptation in Instructional Delivery

Life Campus Center

The proposed Atlanta Public School System Life Campus Center is designed to be an avenue by which those students who feel disengaged or have become disillusioned, disaffected, and/or disaffiliated may develop supportive interpersonal relationships, experience academic success, may develop a positive image of the future, and enhance their self-concepts. This adaptation provides for career and life planning, flexible scheduling, open entry and exit, and permits students at age 16 to choose to enter adult education. The envisioned APS program will be based at the former Bass High School, which is located at 1080 Euclid Avenue, S. W.

This program will offer a full array of high school academic courses, specifically, D.C.T., T & I, as well as VOT vocational courses, customized training, adult education, computer-assisted instruction, job placement, as well as life enhancement courses, and will be open from 8:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Fridays. This program involves a revitalization of the Downtown Learning Center, and a merger with the Washington Evening School. The Life Campus Center will focus on preventing borderline students from dropping out while seeking to get those who have dropped out to return. This facility will provide an educational option for those students who have delivered children and who have to work to support their offspring/families.

The Life Campus Center will have as one of its foremost goals the provision of an educational program which permits students to go to school and fulfill their adult role responsibilities. As envisioned, the Life Campus Center will operate a total of 270 teaching days annually. Students will have the option of registering for 50 minutes or 2 1/2 hour class periods. Those students electing to register for 50-minute classes may complete three semesters of instruction in one year, while those registering for 2 1/2-hour classes may complete six semesters of instruction in one year. Students may only register for either all 50-minute or all 2 1/2-hour classes each semester. A pupil-teacher ratio of 1 to 15 will be adhered to in all academic classes. Student schedules will be developed so that they are supportive of the students non-school responsibilities rather than for administrative convenience.

Though the Life Campus course offerings will parallel those of any comprehensive high school, there will be no interschool athletic teams nor any other interschool extracurricular activities. The Life Campus Center will have an on-site Child Development Center primarily designed to meet the needs of enrolled students. As part of its curricular offerings, the Life Campus Center will require all enrollees to complete one semester of parenting training. Enrollment in the Life Campus Program will be open to any resident of the city of Atlanta desiring to return to school to pursue a high school diploma. Transfer of students from other APS high schools shall only be by recommendation of the sending school's principal and counselor with a parent(s)/guardian(s) concurrence, and by the unanimous approval of the Life Campus committee. The Life Campus Program has as its primary purpose the provision of an option by which: Students having adult-role responsibilities and students who are exhibiting behaviors which are precursors to dropping out and who truly desire to earn a high school diploma may pursue its attainment. Any transfer student failing to receive unanimous intake committee approval may, upon recommendation by 51 percent of the intake committee, be admitted for a 30-day probationary period. If after the probationary period admission is still denied, the transferee must return to his/her home school.

The Principal/Director of the APS Life Campus Center must have a clear vision and an educational philosophy which promotes high expectations and a supportive humane learning environment. This person must believe that all students can succeed, be capable of sharing his/her vision with staff, garner community support, and be willing to fight for the continuous survival of the Life Campus Center.

Individuals who staff this program must believe in the inherent worth of the individual. Further, staff must desire to work with persons whose efforts and presence indicate they have a desire to learn. Life Campus Center personnel must expect all students to succeed and be willing to adopt/adapt instructional practices which lead to

success. They must be able to work with students who have to carry out adult roles (parent(s), wives, husbands, mothers, fathers), as well as students who are adults. Individuals selected to staff this program have to be innovative and imaginative and not bound by the clock nor traditional scheduling.

Classroom Programs

The Atlanta Collaborative recommends that the Atlanta Public School System initiate the following or similar programs which are designed for those students in grades K through 8 who have been retained or who are exhibiting behaviors which tend to indicate that they will be retained at the close of the current year. These instructional approaches are designed to assist retainees/potential retainees to attain the requisite skills which will permit them to experience academic success. Students in these instructional modalities must be permitted to move as rapidly or as slowly as their performance dictates.

Whole Language Instruction

The whole language approach to instruction is based on the realization that learning occurs most readily in classrooms where functionally meaningful language events take place within the context of naturally occurring events. In the classroom there are three characteristics of such naturally occurring events which are necessary for whole language instruction:

a. Texts must not be artifically broken into parts or sub-systems that destroy their functionality and meaning.

b. The integrity of the literacy event must be preserved so that the transactional or social meaning of their involvement is clear to the students.

c. The student-teacher relationship must be more equal and supportive of the learning process while encouraging active student-initiated learning.

Key to this instructional approach is the teachers understanding that they are to guide, support, monitor, encourage, and facilitate but are not to control learning. Whole language programs try to capitalize on naturally occurring events. Therefore, skills teaching in this instructional approach is not bound by a strict scope and sequence, rather they are taught as needed or in the application stage if possible.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is based on the realization that teams of five to eight students working together to attain identified learning goals can result in increased achievement for all team members. To be successful, cooperative learning activities must have as their focus a group goal or reward, and the success of the group is dependent upon the learning of each individual group member. In cooperative learning activities, each team member must be able to demonstrate mastery of certain material thereby contributing to the overall team average; or, each team member must demonstrate they have carried out their part of a team task through classroom presentations. Students involved in cooperative learning classrooms encourage each other to learn, engage in discussions which promote broad thinking, cooperate with one another, permit all students to experience success, and take more responsibility for their own learning.

Computer-Assisted Instruction

The provision of individualized instructional assistance utilizing the educating power of a computer will meet student needs while promoting the desire to learn in participants. A Computer-Assisted Instructional (CAI) program will provide appropriate, individualized learning activities in a positive nonthreatening learning environment. CAI guarantees mastery of material and provides students with immediate feedback in respect to their performance.

In addition to the CAI Laboratory at the Life Campus Center, provisions will be made to offer CAI instruction designed to alleviate previously diagnosed learner problems while expediting participants' movement through the APS curriculum for selected students in grades K-8.

Tutorials

Tutorial activities provide benefits in respect to achievement gains for tutors as well as those students being tutored. Frequently, the results of tutorial activities are reflected first in improvements in test performance, then by improvements in classroom grades. Tutorials as proposed for the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Program will follow one of three formats. Firstly, the program will entail cross-age peer tutoring, wherein those students who are exhibiting marginal academic performance will serve as tutors for students who are three or more years younger. Secondly, the program will involve cross-ability peer tutoring, wherein tutors of average and above ability will serve as tutors for their underachieving classmates. Lastly, the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Program will provide adult-student tutoring, wherein teachers, parents, and/or recruited volunteers will tutor those students whose academic problems are identified as contributing to their likelihood of dropping out.

Counseling and Supplemental Services

The data gathered during the planning phase show that 20 percent of the student interviews and 13 percent of the records reviewed indicated that family/personal problems led to these students leaving APS. During the interviews, former APS students continuously stated that there was no one they felt comfortable with in discussing the problem(s) which caused them to drop out. Based on these facts, the Atlanta Collaborative proposes that APS enhance its provision of counseling services and provide the recommended supplemental services to help diminish the Atlanta dropout rate. It is suggested that this aspect of the Atlanta Dropout Program be initially piloted for 14 months in a target high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools. This component is to be coordinated by ODPR.

Problem-Centered Counseling

Counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels are the key factors in the provision of those services which can preclude dropping out. It is imperative that counselors in the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) be afforded ample time to address the social and academic problems of students. Counseling as part of the Dropout Prevention Program will entail counselors becoming actively involved in the early identification of educationally inhibiting problems and the development of plans of action for their alleviation. Time and opportunities for daily and weekly counseling sessions must become a part of counselor schedules, while providing crisis intervention services as needed.

In addition to the provision of problem-centered counseling services, the school counselor is the person within the educational setting who has been designated as the referral agent for students in need of services from agencies external to the school. The school counselor(s) will also have prime responsibility for insuring that the records of any referred student are continuously updated in respect to services provided and outcomes.

Open Forum

An approach to self-development for students identified as having a need to free themselves of pent-up emotions. This activity is designed to let students speak freely and without penalty about their problems in school or at home. Group sessions will be held on a weekly basis. Sessions are run by a counselor/psychologist trained in group therapy. In addition, weekly individual sessions will be scheduled to address the needs of those students desiring/needing additional assistance.

Care will be taken to maintain the confidentiality of participants. Sessions will be planned so as to preclude students missing the same class period each week. Notices to teachers of students participating in this activity will merely indicate that the student is to report to the counselor's office at a designated time. Evaluation of the success of this effort at gaining behavior change will be based upon student self-reports in respect to the diagnosed difficulties and recorded improvements in education performance.

Certificate of Merit

The Certificate of Merit activity is one which can be immediately implemented in all schools based upon certain systemwide guidelines. Certificates of Merit are awarded by classroom teachers in recognition of some of the students' performance or behavior. In this program students are made aware of the types of behavior actions for which rewards will be provided. Further elaboration of the recognition areas would be provided parents at the beginning of the school year. Areas of improvement will be identified by teachers, and students will be made aware of their individual improvement needs through written Goal Memorandii. Certificates are to be awarded for accomplishments of an academic, social, artistic, athletic, or personal nature. After the awarding of the initial certificate, students will receive additional grade-appropriate certificates/seals on a specific schedule.

Initially, all students in grades K-5 should receive seals on a weekly basis. Beginning mid-year, students in grades K-2 should receive seals once every two weeks, and students in grades 3-5 should receive seals twice a month, based solely upon merit or some target behavior previously specified by the teacher. All certificates/seals should be given out during a special classroom ceremony. Those students earning seals in three or more categories at least three times during the school year will receive a plaque at the school's Awards Day ceremony.

Class Project

Each classroom selects a broad area for investigation. The area or project can range from the production of a play to a book of short stories written by the students. Each student selects one aspect of the project and develops it throughout the course of the year/month, with assistance from the teacher. Student assignments can include writing, drawing, painting, lyrics, and/or researching. Each student's special talent should be utilized to complete the project. At a designated time, the project will be presented to the student body and on Parents' Day to other classes.

Support Services

Many of the needs of students "at risk" for dropping out of school go beyond the purview and resources of the school. Personal needs, family needs, and health needs are examples of needs which extend beyond the school doors. Such problems may surface at school and have repercussions at school, but many require the support and involvement of agencies and institutions outside of the school system. The Atlanta Collaborative, through its Support Services Subcommittee, brought together many of the agencies in the metropolitan Atlanta community which offer services and programs from which these students could benefit. The need for systematic school-to-agency coordination and agency-to-agency cooperation is addressed through the involvement of these agencies. Further, they found that a system for feedback and follow-up on student progress is essential. Based upon the recommendation of the Support Services Subcommittee, the Atlanta Collaborative is proposing the implementation of a support services network. This Support Services Subcommittee developed network is a coordinating process which efficiently links at-risk students with the services and programs they need. Initially, this component of the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Plan will be piloted for 18 months in a specific target area consisting of one high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools. The target area will be selected based primarily on the proportion of at-risk students enrolled. School staff and parents will be informed of the program's goals, the criteria for student participation, and the procedure for student referral. The Support Services Network Referral Form was developed by the Committee and will serve at least two functions: (1) provide for uniform documentation from all agencies of each student's movement through the network and (2) provide periodic feedback to the school system on student progress. Expansion of the Support Services Network will be based upon recommendations by the Atlanta Collaborative in response to evaluation findings.

This component will be managed by the Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery (ODPR). This centrally based office will receive the referrals and determine, with network members, the appropriate program placement(s). The ODPR staff assigned to this component will make the necessary contacts with the receiving agency. The receiving agency, then, will make contact with the parent and child to discuss the specific program or service. While all initial referrals will be from schools in the target area to external agencies, subsequent referrals may be made among agencies as needed. Any subsequent referrals will be documented in the same way as the initial referral. The ODPR will track students and monitor their participation and progress periodically by way of feedback from the agencies. Students with adequate levels of participation will receive awards at their local schools. Additionally, a recognition dinner will be held at the end of each school year for all participating students, parents, teachers, and agency staff.

A range of services will be made available to students through participation in this program. Some of these are: focused tutoring, with specific instructional/diagnostic information provided by the school system; personal counseling; career/employment counseling; child care for parenting teens; adventure programs such as camping; self-esteem building programs; pregnancy prevention programs; goal-setting and decision-making programs; one-on-one friendships with adult mentors; physical health services; experiential enrichment programs; alcohol and drug abuse prevention and/or treatment programs; and after-school positive recreation programs. Additionally, program support such as space and individual program assistance is available from the Atlanta Housing Authority and the Fulton County Board of Commissioners.

Education for Employment

The door to the various economic benefits of American society is education. A spring 1986 General Accounting Office report states that a high school graduate in the current decade is 61 percent more likely to be employed than a dropout. With this statistic in mind, the Employment Subcommittee of the Atlanta Collaborative has spent the past 12 months investigating those factors which preclude the attainment of meaningful employment for Atlanta youth. Through its efforts, the Employment Subcommittee learned that the unemployment rate of Atlanta youth is three times that of the general population, and that the unemployment rate for Atlanta's minority youth is more than twice that of majority youth. Through its business community members, the Employment Subcommittee found that business desires students with solid basic skills and positive work attitudes. Further, it was found that such students are more likely to find and keep jobs. Based on this information, the Atlanta Collaborative recommends the provision of vocational preparation services which focus on solid preparation in reading, writing, mathematics, and reasoning which are capable of adapting to the ever-changing demands of our increasingly technological society.

Vocational Education Programs

The rapidly changing demands of the Atlanta labor market requires that completers of vocational education programs have strong basic competencies in communication, computation, problem solving, and critical thinking skills. The APS vocational education program provides a ready structure wherein students can realize the link between basic competencies and their practical application in respect to existing standards. The key to insuring that vocational education programs fully utilize their potential for holding potential dropouts in school is the 20-hour maximum in respect to the number of hours a student can be employed during the school year. It is imperative that the work experiences of participants in the Atlanta Public Schools vocational programs be monitored and coordinated to insure that students can relate their work experience to other school occurrences and that such experiences foster positive job attitudes. Further, the work experiences must meet the students' needs for practical experience or career exploration. Currently, the APS System offers three vocational education programs with a work experience aspect and 22 other vocational programs. These programs are offered in from 1 to 18 APS high schools and provide an avenue through which the need for mastery of basic competencies can be made real.

In working to realize this goal, the Atlanta Collaborative recommends that the APS Vocational Education Program begin to utilize to a greater extent a cross-curricular approach for insuring that program participants have attained competency in computation, communication, and reasoning. Students enrolled in the various vocational education clusters would have their level of competency assessed utilizing a screening test consisting of a short reading sample, a series of comprehension questions, a question requiring a written response, and questions requiring the demonstration of reasoning and computational skills. Such test would be designed so that they could assess the content area skills at the appropriate level of difficulty while the test items would be based upon materials related to the particular vocational cluster. Students whose test(s) reveal deficiencies will be provided academic assistance through tutorial or other appropriate instructional adaptations which stress attainment of the prescribed content area competencies. These instructional adaptations will utilize content area validated vocational education materials/applications that necessitate the demonstration of the required levels of competency.

Private Industry Council

The Atlanta Private Industry Council (PIC) has as one of its goals the provision of training and services to youth 21 years of age and younger. Within this age group the Atlanta PIC has also stated as a goal the reduction in the number of dropouts through the provision of employment-related programs and services. Such programs may not result in immediate placement in an employment situation as the outcome, but may include the identification in measurable terms of those skills which must be mastered in order to secure a future job. Funded under the auspices of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the Atlanta PIC provides an avenue for funding of work experience, dropout prevention, education for employment, transition to work programs, and other programs targeted at youth without a high school diploma.

The Atlanta Collaborative recommends that future PIC-sponsored JTPA programs targeted at persons 21 years of age and younger have as an integral part of the operations the provision of remedial education training. Further, it is suggested that focus be more on those persons in this age range who are most likely to suffer economic difficulties without the training afforded through PIC by focusing services on the potential dropout, teen parent, dropout, and long-term unemployed persons less than 21 years of age. The Atlanta PIC can assume a greater role in insuring that the Atlanta community remain economically viable. Through refocusing the training provided to persons in the referenced age group from job-specific skills but through the provision of basic competencies via classroom instruction, and those job skills which are transportable from one field to another, the Atlanta PIC can provide an even greater service to the city's young persons. By also targeting a portion of the Summer Youth Employment on the provision of remedial education services to those potential and returning dropouts, the Atlanta PIC's efforts in helping to reduce the dropout rate would have a far greater impact.

Atlanta Compact

The Atlanta Compact envisioned by the Employment Subcommittee of the Atlanta Collaborative would be the next step in the evolution and development of the current Atlanta Partnership of Business and Education. This expansion of the Atlanta Partnership would have as its goal the reduction of the APS dropout rate through the operationalization of three objectives. These objectives are:

-- Improvement of the prospects for employment or further education of APS graduates.

-- Improvement of the academic performance of APS secondary students as assessed by the Georgia Basic Skills Tests.

-- Improvement in the number of APS graduates receiving job or college placements.

Major participants in the projected Atlanta Compact will be representatives from APS, higher education, the business community via the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, the National Alliance of Business, the Atlanta PIC, the Mayor's Office of Economic Development, the Atlanta Partnership, and the Atlanta Dropout Collaborative. As currently conceptualized by the Employment Subcommittee of the Atlanta Collaborative, participants in the Atlanta Compact will jointly make the following commitments.

APS: Improve the quality of educational outcomes at the secondary level. These improvements will be assessed annually by measured increases in attendance, reduction in dropouts, increases in basic skills test scores, increases in post-secondary educational and employment placements.

Atlanta Business Community: Provide priority hiring of qualified graduates of the Atlanta Public Schools for entry-level jobs in Atlanta. Priority hiring means establishing the hiring of qualified Atlanta Public Schools high school graduates as a major hiring goal (without rejecting the needs and interests of other applicants) and a good faith effort on the part of employers to increase the number of qualified Atlanta Public Schools graduates hired for entry-level jobs in Atlanta. This effort will be subject to employer requirements for hiring for such jobs and to employer compliance with applicable legal requirements including prohibition against age discrimination and to the implementation of any affirmative action commitments the employer may have.

City of Atlanta: Explore the possibilities of providing employer-specific customized training for employers participating in the Compact. This would mean a potential employee who has a high school diploma; can read, write, and compute; and who has been specifically trained to the employer's specifications.

Atlanta Dropout Collaborative and the Atlanta Partnership: Explore the posibility of private sector funding for the customized training.

It is projected that this part of the Atlanta Dropout Plan will be phased in during the first three years of implementation.

Parental Involvement

A recurring theme in the interviews with APS dropouts was the feeling that their parents were not concerned/involved with their education. The Atlanta Collaborative following up on this finding learned that parents through activities designed to show support for education lessen students' feelings of separateness from the educational setting. They further found that parents can assist in precluding the development of feelings of alienation which frequently precede dropout behavior. Parent involvement activities can take many forms and approaches; however, the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Collaborative recommends a series of parental involvement activities which utilize the Atlanta Parent-Teacher Association as its operational base.

The parental involvement effort recommended by the Atlanta Collaborative emanates along three exclusive but supportive avenues. The parental involvement thrust will be piloted in a target area consisting of one high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools. Recommendations concerning expansion of this component will be based on the evaluation of the pilot efforts. This component will be managed by the Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery (ODPR).

Parent-Teacher Contacts

Parents at all levels of the educational system will enter into contracts which state that they will:

1. Help their child do schoolwork at home by:

    a. Arranging for a quiet, well-lighted place for daily study.

    b. Limiting television viewing and/or phone calls Monday through Thursday.

    c. Insisting that a period of time each day be spent reviewing each subject.

    d. Asking about the school day and homework daily.

    e. Providing assistance with schoolwork where possible.

2. Attend PTA meetings.

3. Maintain regular communication with the school.

4. Provide teacher-initiated assistance when requested.

The parent-teacher contacts are to be continuously reviewed and modified when necessary. Contracts between the parents-teachers of students who have been identified as "at-risk" will set forth specific parental activities which support and/or augment those instructional approaches detailed in the students' IEP.

Parent-Student Support Activities

Parent-Student Socials

The ODPR will assist local Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) to plan at least an annual non-fundraising social event such as a dinner, picnic, sports festival, play, etc. which will involve all students and parents in the school. Cost for such an activity should be kept at a minimum or should be jointly sponsored by the PTA and the school's adopter to insure that money does not prevent any member of the school family from participating. To encourage schoolwide participation, certificates/ribbons should be given to the grades/departments having the most teachers in attendance and homerooms/grades having the most parents and students in attendance. In addition, awards could be given for spirit, carrying out of theme, teamwork, etc. Such events are designed to foster a greater sense of community and belonging among parents, students, and school staffs.

New Student Orientation

The ODPR in cooperation with the local PTA's and administrators will design a four- to eight-month series of activities to welcome new parents and students to the school. Focus of activities will be on parents and students at grades K, 6, and 9 or of those initial grade levels at each school. Activities will include a review of school rules and regulations, the curriculum for the grades in question (K-5, 6-8, 9-12), system and state policies affecting the grades in question, and performance expectations in the basal(s) and the standardized high school courses. Though the focus will be on particular grades, students and parents new to the school at any grade level could be involved in this program. In addition to the outlined activities, the program will identify parent-teacher mentors for groups of students to assist with other transitional problems which they might experience.

Parent-Educators

The ODPR will assist local PTA's and administrators to identify and secure consultants/trainers to hold a series of parent educational activities. These activities will be developed to meet local needs and will be held at the beginning of the school year to assist parents in feeling comfortable when assisting with schoolwork. Those parents completing the workshops as well as those receiving individualized instruction (parents whose work schedules prevent attendance at group sessions) will be encouraged to tutor their own children. This approach will be targeted to students/parents in grades K-8 where the curricular offerings are not as specialized.

Staff Development/Training

In order to fully implement the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Plan, it will be necessary to reorient and/or retrain existing APS personnel as well as persons recruited to staff components of the Atlanta Plan. Such action is necessary to insure that all participants in the implementation of the Atlanta Plan are thoroughly oriented to the Atlanta Plan and have been made aware of those skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to successfully impact the Atlanta dropout problem. APS staff involved in this effort will be at the instructional, curriculum development, student services, and administrative levels. These staff development efforts will further involve the personnel of the system in making those changes necessary to increase APS's ability to provide a greater percentage of students with a high school diploma. The training component will involve the provision of the skills needed by agency personnel and parents to successfully operate the applicable components of the Atlanta Plan.

Staff development is viewed as an enabling aspect of the Atlanta Plan. Through the staff development activities:

1. Administrators will become more diligent in observing the behaviors of students.
    a. They will be cognizant of changes in social behavior.
    b. They will be aware of those student behaviors which indicate an absence of student-school fit.
    c. They will be conscious of the teacher evaluative aspects of certain student behaviors.
    d. They will be aware of techniques which can successfully shape student behaviors.
    e. They will be able to equitably apply corrective actions for inappropriate student behaviors.
    f. They will be advocates of all students.
2. Instructional personnel will be able to adopt instructional techniques/approaches to meet the educational needs of all students.
    a. They will not be bound by the textbook.

b. They will utilize research findings which identify successful instructional policies (i.e., tutorials, whole language instruction, open campus programs).

c. They will be aware of the "teacher effects" on student performance.

d. They will be concerned with fostering positive student self-concepts.

e. They will be aware that the goal of the instructional effort is to have all students succeed.

f. They will be advocates for students and their needs.

g. They will be conscious of the need to be fair in all student-teacher interactions.

h. They will be at ease working with all parents.

i. They will continuously observe students and notice behavioral cues.

3. Curriculum personnel will establish standards in respect to content and required levels of performance but will not by administrative fiat dictate now, when, or where students will be taught.

   a. Teachers will be encouraged to utilize their full professional competencies.

   b. Teachers will be encouraged to be innovative in their instructional approaches.

   c. Teachers will be encouraged to utilize technology wherever and whenever possible.

   d. Teachers will be encouraged to make learning fluid and exciting.

4. Student services personnel (i.e., counselors, social workers, and psychologist) will be comfortable and competent in providing crisis intervention, group counseling, case management, and student referral services.

   a. Counselors will encourage students experiencing personal, family, economic, or other difficulties to come into their offices.

   b. Student service workers will act as student advocates.

   c. Student service workers will be aware of when to make appropriate internal (psychologist, social worker) or external (community agencies/organizations) referrals.

In addition to the pre-implementation staff development thrust, personnel from those schools/programs involved in implementing the Atlanta Plan will be involved in quarterly staff development activities. The quarterly activities will be targeted to meet the needs discerned by the formative evaluation or through staff comments.

Agency personnel and parents will be provided through training of those skills needed to successfully implement the Parental Involvement Component and Support Services aspect of the Atlanta Plan.

5. Agency personnel will be competent in the coordinated delivery of services to referred students.

    a. Agency personnel will be aware of the services provided by each participating agency and all components of the Atlanta Plan.

    b. Agency personnel will be able to interpret and utilize data provided by referring schools.

    c. Agency personnel will provide inter-agency referrals for students whose needs their agency cannot meet.

    d. Agency personnel will be at ease working with parents and school system personnel.

    e. Agency personnel will provide continuous feedback to APS concerning referral students.

6. Parents will be able to fully participate in the Parental Involvement aspects of the Atlanta Plan.

    a. Parents will be aware of those parental responsibilities which they can confidently contract to provide.

    b. Parents will be comfortable in working with agency personnel and members of the business community in the development of educational support activities.

    c. Parents will be at ease in providing tutorial assistance to their sons/daughters.

    d. Parents will be aware of how to interpret and utilize data received/provided by APS.

    e. Parents will be aware of all components of the Atlanta Plan.

The services provided through the Staff Development/Training component should enhance the likelihood of the successful implementation of the various programs which comprise the Atlanta Plan.

Evaluation

The Atlanta Collaborative for Dropout Prevention will purchase evaluation services for the Atlanta Dropout Prevention Plan from the APS Department of Research and Evaluation. Evaluation activities will entail a formative and summative assessment of the Atlanta Plan and its components. Assessment activities will include focus on processes as they relate to implementation and operation of the Atlanta Plan. Further, the outcomes

of the Atlanta Plan in respect to impact as measured by participants' perceptions, as well as objective findings will be discerned. The Atlanta Plan will be continuously evaluated, and findings will be utilized by the Atlanta Collaborative in making recommendations regarding changes in its implementation of operations.

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